



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General

October 10, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense

The Honorable Rajiv Shah
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

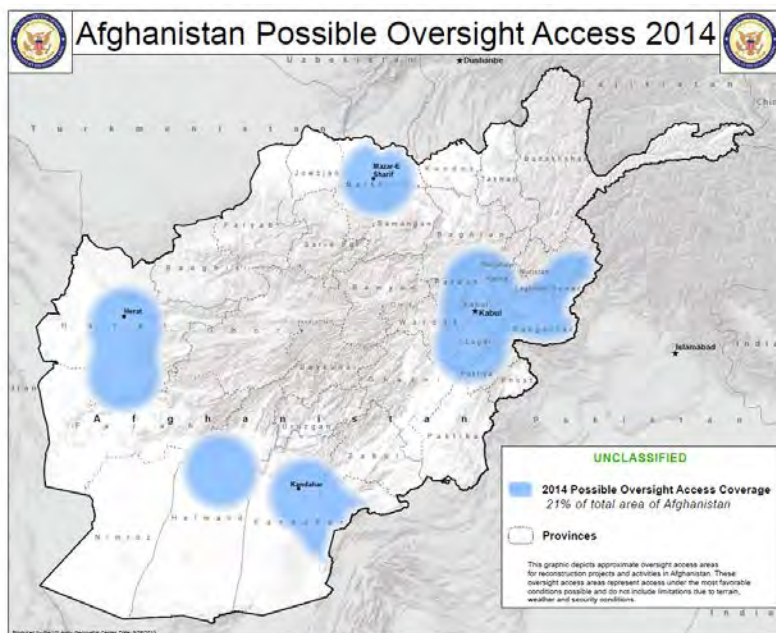
Dear Secretary Kerry, Secretary Hagel, and Administrator Shah:

Since my appointment by the President over a year ago, I have been concerned about the impact of the coalition troop drawdown on security and the related implications for ensuring adequate oversight of the U.S.-funded reconstruction effort in Afghanistan. The recent attack at the Herat Consulate illustrates the dangerous environment we must all confront as we plan for the future. Therefore, I am writing to request information that will assist SIGAR as we consider the best approaches for carrying out our oversight mandate in Afghanistan's changing security landscape, coordinating our efforts with other inspectors general, and ultimately helping the U.S. government mitigate the risks associated with shrinking oversight access.

In the course of SIGAR's work, U.S. officials have told us that it is often difficult for program and contracting staff to visit reconstruction sites in Afghanistan. SIGAR personnel have direct experience with this problem, having already encountered difficulty obtaining military escort to travel into contested areas. For example, earlier this year SIGAR was unable to visit infrastructure projects in northern Afghanistan valued at \$72 million because they are located in areas that could not be reached by U.S. civilian employees. SIGAR is referring to these inaccessible reconstruction sites as areas outside of the "oversight bubbles." The areas covered by these "oversight bubbles" are defined by the ability of the U.S. government to provide both adequate security and rapid emergency medical support to civilian employees traveling to the area.

It is clear that everyone working in Afghanistan, including SIGAR, will struggle to continue providing the direct U.S. civilian oversight that is needed in Afghanistan. U.S. military officials have told us that they will provide civilian access only to areas within a one-hour round trip of an advanced medical facility. Although exceptions can be made to this general policy, we have been told that requests to visit a reconstruction site outside of these "oversight bubbles" will probably be denied. Similarly, State Department officials have warned us that their ability to reach reconstruction sites will be extremely limited due to constraints on providing emergency medical support without assistance from the Department of Defense (DOD). They have also warned us about the challenges of providing adequate protection to civilians traveling in insecure areas.

Significant portions of Afghanistan are already inaccessible to SIGAR, other inspectors general, the Government Accountability Office, and other U.S. civilians conducting oversight, such as contracting officers. SIGAR believes this constraint on oversight will only worsen as more U.S. and coalition bases close. The map shown to the right and those attached to this letter illustrate SIGAR's concerns.¹ Although it is difficult to predict the future of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, it is likely that no more than 21 percent of Afghanistan will be accessible to U.S. civilian oversight personnel by the end of the transition, a 47 percent decrease since 2009.² We have also been told by State Department officials that this projection may be optimistic, especially if the security situation does not improve.



During my trips to Afghanistan, I have talked to military and civilian officials who are working hard to develop alternative means to help protect the U.S. taxpayers' investment. For example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in Afghanistan is exploring how to use third-party monitors to help oversee reconstruction sites. Additionally, State Department personnel are contemplating how to expand oversight access by periodically deploying emergency medical and security forces to the edge of the "oversight bubbles." Even if these alternative means are used to oversee reconstruction sites, direct oversight of reconstruction programs in much of Afghanistan will become prohibitively hazardous or impossible as U.S. military units are withdrawn, coalition bases are closed, and civilian reconstruction offices in the field are closed.

To help the U.S. prepare for these challenges, SIGAR will conduct audits and begin other initiatives to examine the consequences of restricted oversight in Afghanistan. For example, we intend to conduct

¹ The attached maps were prepared by the U.S. Army Geospatial Center based on its own information and information provided to SIGAR by DOD and State Department officials. Specific locations and other technical detail in the source documents have been omitted for security reasons. The maps for 2009, 2011, and 2013 were prepared using historical information. The December 2014 map shows the possible oversight access at the end of transition based on current U.S. government assessments, which may change based on ongoing negotiations with the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan or adjustments to U.S. plans as the transition continues.

² The 21 percent figure may be too high. The oversight access shown on the attached maps presents a best-case scenario where weather, terrain, and security conditions pose no serious threat to helicopter medical evacuation missions.

an audit of third-party monitoring efforts at USAID, and we intend to use the geospatial project information provided earlier this year to analyze the oversight risks for U.S. reconstruction projects.³

However, we will need additional information and assistance to properly analyze risks and prepare for shrinking oversight access. Therefore, please provide the following information:

1. What lessons learned from conducting oversight in high-risk security environments, such as Iraq and Pakistan, can your organizations apply to Afghanistan?
2. Will your organizations have major programs or projects—major in terms of dollar value (\$5 million or greater) or because they are mission critical—under way outside of the “oversight bubbles” at the end of this calendar year? If so, please indicate the program or project name, location, dollar value, implementing partner if applicable, and expected completion date.
3. What new programs or projects will your organizations launch that will be outside of the “oversight bubbles” projected to exist at the end of the transition in December 2014? Please indicate the program or project name, location, dollar value, implementing partner if applicable, and expected completion date.
4. For current or new programs or projects that will be outside the “oversight bubbles” at the end of the transition, what specific plans have your organizations made for oversight for each project and program? Do they include special arrangements for U.S. civilian oversight access, local-national monitoring, third-party monitoring, periodic checks of work performed by local and third-party monitors, remote or automated monitoring, self-certification arrangements, other forms of oversight, or simple acceptance of higher risks?

Due to the importance of this issue, please provide the requested information within 30 days of the date of this letter. Should your staff have any questions regarding this request, they should contact Monica Brym at

Thank you in advance for your continued assistance.

Sincerely,



John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

³ SIGAR, letter of inquiry regarding planned and ongoing reconstruction projects, 22 February 2013.

cc:

General Lloyd J. Austin III
Commander, U.S. Central Command

General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr.
Commander, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and
Commander, International Security Assistance Force

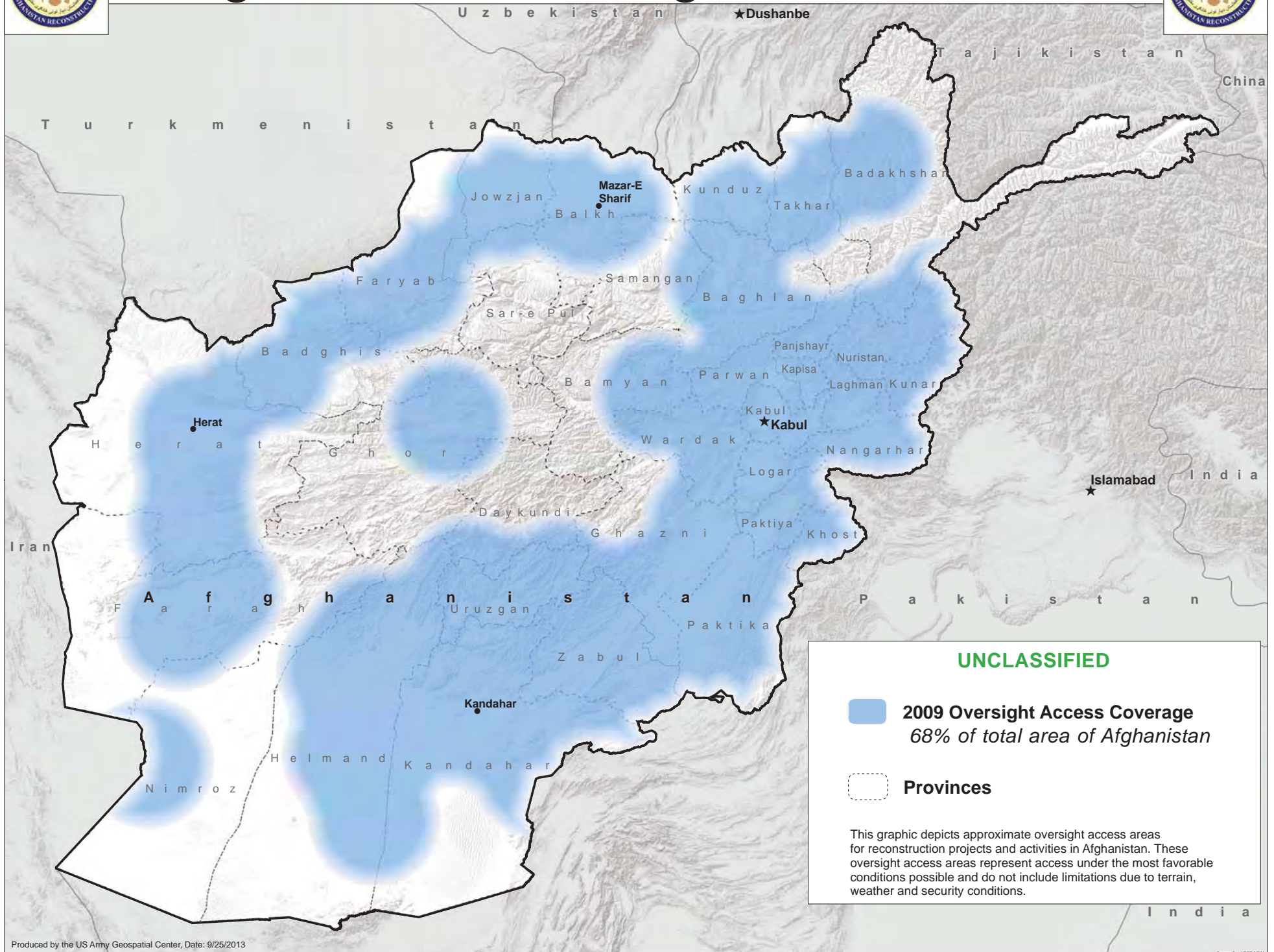
Ambassador James Blair Cunningham
U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan

William Hammink, Mission Director
U.S. Agency for International Development/Afghanistan

Attachments: Afghanistan oversight-bubble maps (4)
Illustration of oversight bubble

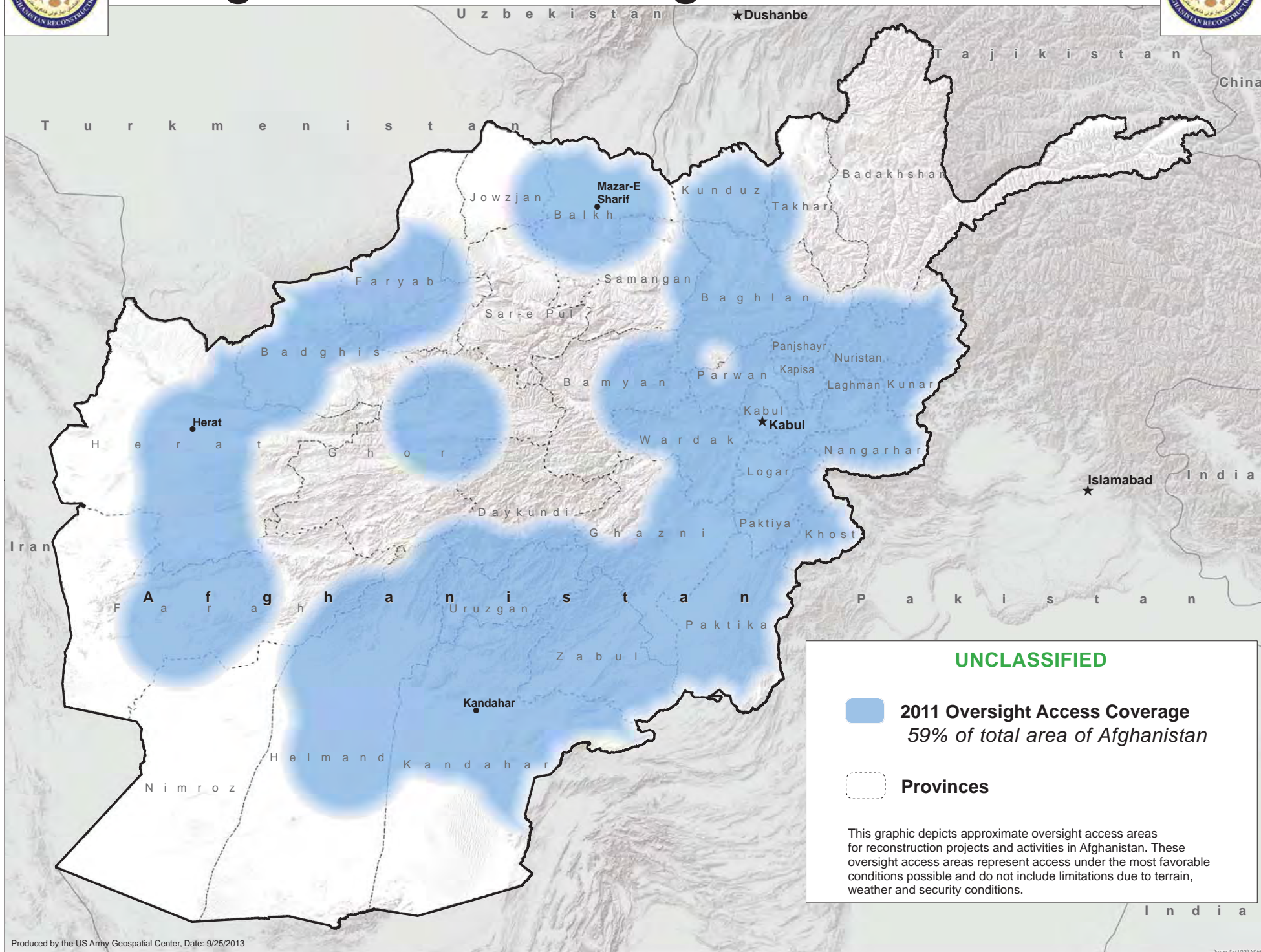


Afghanistan Oversight Access 2009



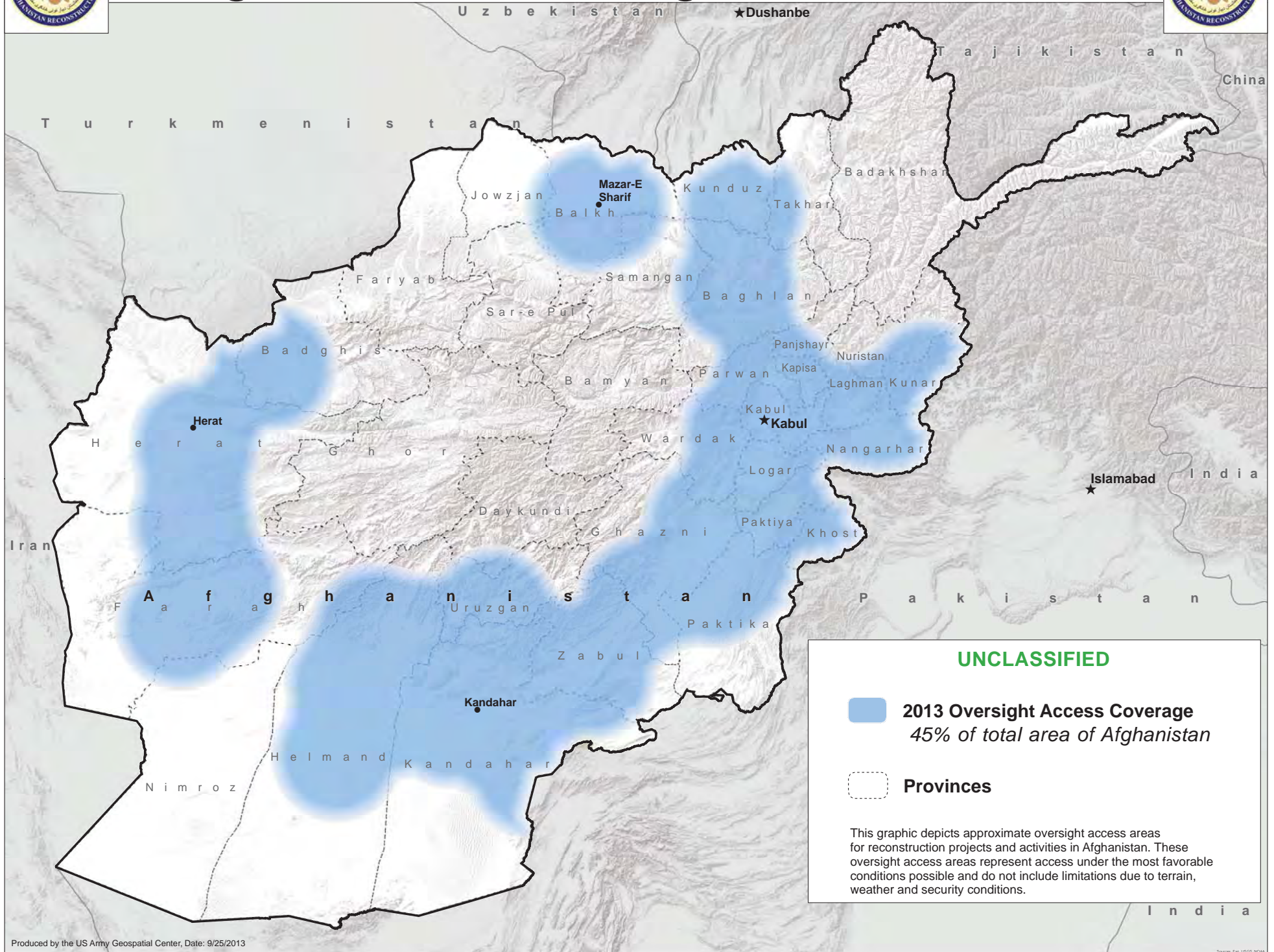


Afghanistan Oversight Access 2011





Afghanistan Oversight Access 2013





Afghanistan Possible Oversight Access 2014

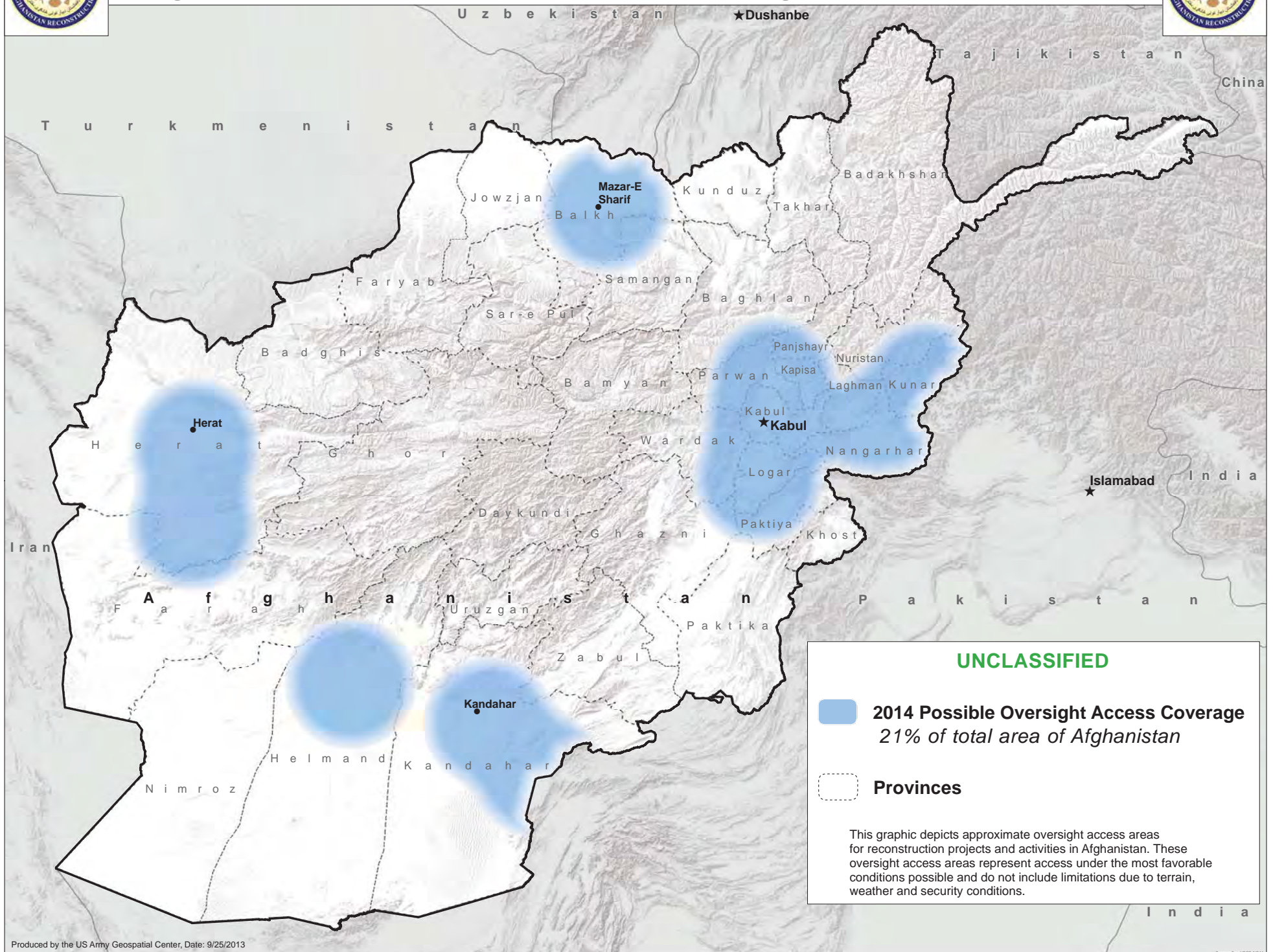


ILLUSTRATION OF AN OVERSIGHT BUBBLE

